

Non-Conventional Sintered Aluminium Powder Alloys

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Statement of Originality

To the best of my knowledge, the material presented in this thesis is original, except where otherwise noted in the text. None of this research has been submitted in whole, or part, for any degree at this, or any other university.

Tim Sercombe

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis was to improve the properties of pressed and sintered aluminium powder alloys. This improvement was to be achieved using two methods. The first method involved the selection of an alloy system using binary aluminium phase diagrams and a knowledge of the phase diagram characteristics of ideal sintering systems. The second approach involved the judicious use of selected trace element additions to modify the sintering characteristics of aluminium and its alloys.

A trace amount of magnesium was found to be critical to the sintering of aluminium powder due to its disrupting effect on the tenacious oxide layer covering the powder particles. The critical amount of Mg required to optimise both density and mechanical properties is dependent on the specific volume of oxide and the therefore particle size. The optimum concentration is 0.1-1.0wt% Mg.

The Al-Sn phase diagram exhibits many of the characteristics of an ideal sintering system. Unsurprisingly, Sn was found to be an extremely efficient sintering aid, but only in the presence of Mg. Near full density parts were produced using an Al-8Sn-0.15Mg alloy in short sintering times (30 minutes). Additionally, as-sintered ductilities exceeding 20% were achieved using an Al-2Sn-0.15Mg alloy. Alloys based on the Al-Sn-Mg system lend themselves to sintering without compaction and therefore freeformed Al-Sn-Mg alloys have been produced and sintered to near full density from a starting density of ~50%.

Trace amounts of Sn (Pb, In, Bi, or Sb) enhance the sintering response of an Al-4Cu-0.15Mg alloy via a vacancy binding mechanism. A similar mechanism suppresses natural ageing and stimulates artificial ageing when trace amounts of Sn are added to this alloy. A Sn-modified 2XXX series alloy has also been produced with mechanical properties nearly 20% above current commercial alloys. Along with the addition of 0.1wt%Sn, this improvement required an alteration to the solution treatment cycle which allowed the use of a higher sintering temperature without the formation of large amounts of boundary phase.

List of Associated Publications

T.B. Sercombe and G.B. Shaffer, "Sintering of a Non-Conventional Aluminium Powder Alloy", Advances in Powder Metallurgy and Particulate Materials - 1997, R.McKotch and R.Webb Eds., Proceedings of the 1997 Conference on Powder Metallurgy and Particulate Materials, Chicago, IL, 29 June -2 July 1997.

Lumley, T.B. Sercombe, and G.B. Schaffer, "Surface Oxide and the Role of Magnesium During the Sintering of Aluminium", Metallurgical and Materials Transactions A, in press.

Sercombe, G.B. Schaffer and P. Calvert, "Freeform Fabrication of Functional Aluminium Prototypes Using Powder Metallurgy", Journal Of Materials Science, submitted February 1998.

Sercombe and G.B. Schaffer, "The Effect of Trace Elements on the Sintering of Al-Cu Alloys", Acta Metallurgica, in press.

Sercombe and G.B. Schaffer, "On the use of trace additions of Sn to enhance sintered 2xxx series Al powder alloys", International Journal of Powder Metallurgy, in preparation.

Table of Contents

Statement of Originality	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
Abstract.....	iv
List of Associated Publications	v
Table of Contents.....	vi
List of Tables	xi
List of Figures	xii
Chapter 1. Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2. Literature Review.....	4
2.1 Introduction	4
2.2 Metallic Powders.....	5
2.2.1 Compacting Metallic Powders	7
2.3 Overview of Sintering	8
2.3.1 Solid State Sintering.....	8
2.3.2 Enhanced Sintering Techniques	10
2.3.2.1 Activated Sintering	13
2.3.2.2 Liquid Phase Sintering.....	13
2.3.2.3 Supersolidus Sintering	15
2.4 Mechanisms of Liquid Phase Sintering	15
2.4.1 Wetting	17
2.4.2 Particle Re-arrangement	21
2.4.3 Solution Reprecipitation	21
2.4.4 Formation of a Solid Skeleton	22
2.4.4 Pore Elimination	23
2.4.5 Particle Disintegration.....	26
2.4.6 Directional Grain Growth.....	27
2.4.7 Summary Of Mechanisms	28
2.5 Aluminium Powder Metallurgy	28
2.5.1 Introduction	28
2.5.2 Sintering Aids for Al.....	29
2.5.2.1 Sintering of Al with Cu.....	29
2.5.2.2 Sintering of Al with Sn	32
2.5.2.3 Sintering of Al with Mg.....	34
2.5.2.4 Sintering of Al with Zn.....	35

2.5.2.5 Sintering of Al with Si.....	36
2.5.3 Commercial Al Powder Alloys.....	37
2.5.4 The Effect of Sintering Atmosphere	40
2.5.5 The Effect Of Lubricant.....	40
2.6 Oxide	42
2.6.1 Introduction	42
2.6.2 Formation of the Oxide Layer on Aluminium.....	42
2.6.3 The Oxide Layer and Sintering.....	45
2.6.4 Reaction of Mg with Alumina	46
2.7 Trace Element Effects	47
2.7.1 Trace Element Effects in Materials.....	47
2.7.2 Role of Trace Elements in Sintering	48
2.7.3 Trace Element Effects in Ageing of Al-Cu	48
2.8 Rapid Prototyping.....	50
2.8.1 Introduction	50
2.8.2 Functional Prototyping Techniques	51
2.8.3 Extrusion Freeform Fabrication.....	52
2.9 Summary	53
<i>Chapter 3. Experimental Techniques.....</i>	<i>55</i>
3.1 Powders	55
3.2 Mixing, Compaction, Sintering and Density Measurements	58
3.3 Metallography and Mechanical Properties.....	59
3.4 Determination of Oxide thickness	60
3.5 Pressed and Sintered Alloys	62
3.6 Area Fraction Liquid.....	64
3.7 Microprobe	64
3.8 Dihedral Angle Measurement.....	64
3.9 Ageing	65
3.10 Rapid Prototyping.....	66
3.11. Dilatometry	68
<i>Chapter 4. Role of Mg in the Sintering of Al Powder</i>	<i>69</i>
4.1 Introduction	69
4.2 Results	69
4.2.1 Al-Mg Alloys.....	69

4.2.2 Oxide Thickness.....	72
4.2.3 Particle Size Effect	74
4.2.4 Al-Sn-Mg Alloys.....	76
4.3 Discussion	78
4.3.1 Oxide Thickness.....	78
4.3.2 The Role of Magnesium in Pressed and Sintered Aluminium	79
4.3.3 The Role of Magnesium in pressed and Sintered Al-Sn Alloys	83
4.5 Conclusion.....	84
<i>Chapter 5. Sn as a Major Alloying Element.....</i>	<i>85</i>
5.1 Introduction	85
5.2 Results	87
5.3 Discussion	94
5.4 Conclusion	96
<i>Chapter 6. Rapid Prototyping via Extrusion Freeform Fabrication</i>	<i>97</i>
6.1 Introduction	97
6.2 Binder Selection	98
6.3. Al-Sn-Mg Specimens.....	102
6.4 Al-Sn-Mg-Al₂O₃ Specimens	104
6.5 Functionally Graded Material Parts	108
6.6 Conclusion	110
<i>Chapter 7. Effect of Trace Element Additions on the Al-Cu System.....</i>	<i>111</i>
7.1 Introduction	111
7.2 Results	111
7.2.1 The Effect of Trace Elements on the Sintering of an Al-4Cu-0.15Mg Alloy.....	111
7.2.1.1 Densification and Properties	111
7.2.1.2 Area Fraction Liquid Measurements.....	114
7.2.1.3 Microprobe Analysis.....	118
7.2.1.4 Dihedral Angle Measurement.	120
7.2.1.5 Effect of Heating Rate and Sintering Time	121
7.2.2 Effect of Trace Additions of Sn on the Aging of Al-4%Cu-0.15%Mg ALLOYS.....	122
7.2.2.1 Ageing Curves	122
7.2.2.2 Differential Scanning Calorimetry.....	123
7.2.2.3. Tensile Properties.....	126
7.2.3 Summary.....	127

7.3 Discussion.....	127
7.3.1 Effect of Trace Elements on the Sintering of Al-4%Cu-0.15%Mg	128
7.3.2 Effect of Trace Additions of Sn on the Ageing response of Al-4%Cu-0.15%Mg	135
7.3.2.1 Artificial Ageing	135
7.3.2.2 Natural Ageing	136
7.3.2.3 Mechanical Properties.....	136
7.4 Conclusions and Commercial Applications.....	138
<i>Chapter 8. Comparison with A Commercial Alloy</i>	<i>140</i>
8.1 Introduction	140
8.2 Results and Discussion	140
8.2.1 Al-4.4Cu-0.8Si-0.5Mg	140
8.2.2 Addition of Sn to Al-4.4Cu-0.8Si-0.5Mg.....	141
8.2.2.1 Effect of alloying additions	141
8.2.2.2 Ageing	142
8.2.2.3 Mechanical Properties.....	144
8.2.3 Trace Additions of Sn to Al-Cu-Mg Alloys.....	146
8.2.3.1 Effect of Process Variables on an Al-5Cu-0.15Mg-0.25Sn Alloy	146
8.2.3.3 Effect of Sn Content	153
8.2.4 Al-4.4Cu-0.8Si-xMg-0.1Sn Alloys	156
8.2.5 Al-4.4Cu-0.8Si-0.5Mg-[0.1Sn] Alloys.....	157
8.3 Summary of Alloys.....	161
8.4 Conclusion	161
<i>Chapter 9. Conclusions and Future Work</i>	<i>162</i>
9.1 Conclusions.....	162
9.2 Future Work	163
<i>Chapter 10. References</i>	<i>164</i>
<i>Appendix I. Oxide Formation and Measurement.....</i>	<i>183</i>
I.1 Oxide Formation.....	183
I.2 Measuring Oxide Thicknesses.....	184
I.2.1 ESCA	184
I.2.2 AES	187
I.2.3 Destructive Testing	188
I.2.4 Non-Destructive Testing	191
I.2.5 Chemical Oxide Thickness.....	193
I.3 References for Appendix I	193

List of Tables

Table 1.1. Comparison of the amount of material in a typical family car	1
Table 1.2. Comparison between properties of wrought and powder aluminium alloys	2
Table 2.1. Types of powder production.....	7
Table 2.2. Classical description of the stages of liquid phase sintering.....	16
Table 2.3. Contributions of basic mechanisms of liquid phase sintering to rearrangement and shape change	28
Table 2.4. Comparison between wrought and powder alloy compositions	38
Table 2.5. Selected Properties of commercially available Al pre-mixes	39
Table 2.6. Summary of prior measurements of the oxide thickness on pure Al.....	43
Table 2.7. Some commercial rapid prototyping technologies	50
Table 2.8. Examples of rapid prototyping techniques that are capable of producing functional metallic or ceramic parts	51
Table 3.1 Powders used.....	55
Table 3.2 Dies used	59
Table 3.3 Analysis of particles for ESCA.	60
Table 3.4. Compositions examined.....	63
Table 3.5. Elements and quantities used in investigating the effect of various trace elements on the sintering of Al-[Cu]-Mg alloys.	63
Table 3.6 Count times used on the Electron Microprobe.....	64
Table 3.7 Alloys used for rapid prototyping.....	68
Table 7.1. Summary of ageing times to produce peak hardness.....	123
Table 7.2. Vacancy binding energies for elements used.	129
Table 7.3. Solid solubility in Al for the elements which enhance sintering of Al-4Cu-0.15Mg alloys	134
Table 8.1. Comparison between published data for Eckart 123 and that obtained for the same alloy made and sintered at UQ.....	141
Table 8.2. Summary of the properties of selected alloys from this chapter.....	161

List of Figures

Figure 2.1. Collection of possible particle shapes and a suggested qualitative description.	6
Figure 2.2. Mass transport mechanisms during solid state sintering	9
Figure 2.3. Shrinkage by rearrangement and center approach (shape change) .during sintering.....	10
Figure 2.4. Schematic diagram showing the difference between densification and swelling owing to solubility effects	12
Figure 2.5. Idealised phase diagram of a typical liquid phase sintered system	14
Figure 2.6. Binary phase diagram for iron with copper	15
Figure 2.7. Approximate time-scale for liquid phase sintering where densification occurs by a progression of overlapping stages after the liquid first forms	16
Figure 2.8. The solid-liquid-vapour equilibrium for (a) good wetting and (b) poor wetting situations	17
Figure 2.9. The general equilibrium at a three-phase intersection	18
Figure 2.10. The dihedral angle and surface energy equilibrium between two intersecting grains with a partially penetrating liquid	19
Figure 2.11. Pore formed due to capillary-induced flow of the liquid Ni	24
Figure 2.12 Example of pore elimination by liquid-grain flow into a pore	25
Figure 2.13 Schematic of buoyancy driven pore migration where the width of the liquid channel is smaller than the diameter of the pore	26
Figure 2.14. Model of grain boundary penetration by a liquid phase	27
Figure 2.15. Aluminium - Copper phase diagram.....	29
Figure 2.16. Aluminium - Tin phase diagram.....	33
Figure 2.17. Aluminium - Magnesium phase diagram.....	35
Figure 2.18. Expansion as a function of Mg content for Al-Mg alloys sintered at 500°C.....	35
Figure 2.19. Aluminium - Zinc phase diagram	36
Figure 2.20. Aluminium - Silicon phase diagram	37
Figure 2.21. DSC run at 5K/min for an Al-1.66at%Cu alloy	48
Figure 2.22 Ageing curves for Al-4%Cu with and without 0.05%In at 130 and 190°C.	49
Figure 3.1. SEM images of powders used	57
Figure 3.2. Temperature profiles for T51 (solid line) and T6 (broken line) processing	65
Figure 3.3. Schematic of the extrusion freeform fabrication apparatus.	66
Figure 3.4. A tensile specimen being free formed using the EFF technique.....	67
Figure 4.1. Dilatometry curves for Al-x%Mg where x is 0, 0.15 and 1.5.	70
Figure 4.2. The effect of Mg on the sintering of binary Al-Mg alloys.....	71
Figure 4.3. As sintered tensile properties for Al-Mg alloys sintered 30 minutes at 620°C.	71
Figure 4.4. Typical high resolution multiplex scan across the Al and Al ₂ O ₃ portion of the ESCA signal.....	72
Figure 4.5. Typical ESCA depth profile of an Al plate and powder.	73

Figure 4.6. The effect of particle size on the thickness of oxide layer formed on Al powder. Points are averages of at least 3 trials and error bars show 95% confidence intervals	73
Figure 4.7. Variation of surface area with particle size for Al powder.....	74
Figure 4.8. The effect of Mg additions on the sintered density of various size fractions of Al powder.....	75
Figure 4.9. Amount of Mg required to produce peak density as a function of oxide volume	76
Figure 4.10. Backscattered electron images of an Al-8Sn alloy with (a) and (b) and without (c) and (d) 0.15%Mg.	77
Figure 4.11. Exuded liquid on the surface of an Al-8Sn alloy after sintering for 30 minutes at 620°C.....	77
Figure 5.1. Equilibrium phase diagram for Al-Sn, from (26).....	85
Figure 5.2. The effect of (a) sintering temperature and Sn content and (b) Sn content at a sintering temperature of 600°C and 620°C on the theoretical volume fraction liquid.	86
Figure 5.3. The effect of Sn content on green density (expressed as a percentage of theoretical density) of Al alloys pressed at 200MPa.	88
Figure 5.5. The effect of various Sn and Mg content on the (a) densification, (b) tensile strength and (c) strain to failure of powder compacts.....	88
Figure 5.6. Effect of Mg on the (a) densification, (b) tensile strength and (c) ductility on an Al-8%Sn alloy.....	89
Figure 5.7. Effect of Sn content on the densification and as sintered (T1) tensile strength and strain to failure of an Al-0.15Mg alloy	90
Figure 5.8. Typical backscattered SEM micrographs of (a) Al-1%Sn-0.15%Mg, (b) Al-4%Sn-0.15%Mg and (c) Al-8%Sn-0.15%Mg alloys sintered for 30 minutes at 620°C	91
Figure 5.9. The effect of various Sn and Cu content on the (a) densification, (b) tensile strength and (c) strain to failure of powder compacts sintered for 30 minutes at 620°C.....	92
Figure 5.10. Horizontal sections though Figure 5.9 at 2%Sn	93
Figure 6.1. TGA of freeformed Al-8Sn-5Mg-7.4PVAc ("PVAc") and Al-8Sn-4Mg-4.2PMMA ("PMMA") heated in N ₂ at 2°C min ⁻¹ to ~425°C.	98
Figure 6.2. Typical weight loss curves for (a) PVAc binder at held at 250 and 300°C and (b) PMMA at 300°C.....	99
Figure 6.3. Amount of resin lost during debinding as a function of Mg content in the specimens containing PVAc at 250 and 300°C and PMMA at 350°C.....	100
Figure 6.4. Backscattered electron micrographs of an Al-8Sn-6Mg-PMMA alloy (a) as fabricated and (b) as sintered and (c) sintered Al-8Sn-5Mg-PVAc alloy.	101
Figure 6.5. The role of Mg on the sintered density of freeformed Al-8Sn tensile bars.	102
Figure 6.6. As sintered tensile properties for freeformed tensile bars containing 8%Sn and various Mg levels.	104
Figure 6.7. The effect of Al ₂ O ₃ on the sintering of freeformed Al-8Sn-6Mg alloys.....	105
Figure 6.8. Backscattered electron images of Al-8Sn-6Mg-10Al ₂ O ₃ (a) green and (b) sintered	106
Figure 6.9. EDS of regions 1 to 4 shown in Figure 6.8(b)	107

Figure 6.10. Free formed functionally gradient gears.....	108
Figure 6.11. Microstructure of an FGM gear	109
Figure 7.1. Effect of trace element concentration on the densification of an Al-4Cu-0.15Mg alloy sintered for 30 minutes at 620°C.....	112
Figure 7.2. The effect of trace amounts of Sn on the as sintered (T1) tensile properties of an Al - 4% Cu - 0.15% Mg alloy.....	112
Figure 7.3. Effect of 0.1wt% of various elements on the liquid phase sintering of an Al-4Cu-0.15Mg alloy.....	113
Figure 7.4. Effect of 0.1wt% additions of various trace elements on the sintering of binary Al-0.15Mg alloys	113
Figure 7.5. Backscattered electron image of Al - 4%Cu - 0.15%Mg (a) with and (b) without 0.25% Sn	115
Figure 7.6. Effect of a trace addition of Sn on the area fraction of liquid on an Al-4Cu-0.15Mg alloy.....	116
Figure 7.7. Effect of various trace elements on the area fraction liquid of an Al - 4Cu - 0.15Mg alloy after 10 minutes at 620°C.....	117
Figure 7.8. The influence of the amount of liquid during sintering to the final densification of Al-4Cu- 0.15Mg alloys with various trace element additions.....	117
Figure 7.9. Backscattered electron image showing inhomogeneous diffusion regions in an Al-4Cu- 0.15Mg-0.25Sn alloy, quenched from 590°C.....	118
Figure 7.10. Cu and Sn profile across the region shown in Figure 7.9.	118
Figure 7.11. Backscattered electron image showing typical regions analysed to produce data in Figure 7.12.	119
Figure 7.12. Microprobe analysis of (a) Cu and (b) Sn levels, on selected areas (see Figure 7.11) of an Al-4Cu-0.15Mg-0.25Sn alloy quenched at 590°C.....	119
Figure 7.13. Backscattered electron images of dihedral angles in an Al-4Cu-0.15Mg alloy (a) with and (b) without 0.25%Sn.....	120
Figure 7.14. Effect of Sn on the dihedral angle distribution of an Al-4Cu-0.15Mg alloy	120
Figure 7.15. The effect of heating rate and sintering time on the densification of an Al-4Cu-0.15Mg alloy (a) with and (b) without 0.25Sn	121
Figure 7.16. The effect of trace levels of Sn on the artificial ageing response of an Al-4Cu-0.15 Mg alloy aged at (a) 190°C and (b) 130°C.....	122
Figure 7.17. Differential Scanning Calorimetry for Al - 4Cu - 0.15Mg with and without 0.25Sn....	124
Figure 7.18. Typical DSC curves for solution treated Al-4Cu-0.15Mg alloys	124
Figure 7.19. Effect of Sn additions to the formation of GP zones in a solution treated Al-4Cu-0.15Mg alloy.....	125
Figure 7.20. Effect of 0.25% Sn on the natural ageing of Al-4Cu-0.15Mg alloy.....	125
Figure 7.21. Effect of Sn content on tensile properties for an Al-4Cu-0.15Mg alloy.....	126
Figure 7.22. Diffusivity of various elements in Al at 550°C - from (197). No data for Bi was listed.....	130

Figure 7.23. Schematic representation of how the amount of liquid may vary with various trace additions	131
Figure 7.24. Surface tension for the elements that enhanced sintering in the Al-Cu-Mg system	133
Figure 7.25. A vertical section through the Al-Cu-Sn ternary phase diagram at 4wt%Cu.	137
Figure 8.1. The effect of adding the various elements to make up Eckart 123	142
Figure 8.2. Ageing curve for Al-4.4Cu-0.8Si-0.5Mg, with and without 0.25Sn, at 160°C	143
Figure 8.3. The effect of trace amounts of Sn on the sintered density and T6 properties of an Al-4.4Cu-0.7Si-0.5Mg alloys sintered for 20 minutes at 590°C	145
Figure 8.4. The effect of sintering temperature on the sintered density of Al-5Cu-0.15Mg-0.25Sn..	146
Figure 8.5. Microstructures of an Al-5Cu-0.15Mg-0.25Sn alloy sintered for 20 minutes at (a) 590°C and (b) 620°C	147
Figure 8.6. Effect of sintering temperature on mechanical properties for an Al-5Cu-0.15Mg-0.25Sn alloy at an ageing temperature of 160°C.....	147
Figure 8.7. The effect of solution treatment on the peak aged tensile strength of an Al-5Cu-0.15Mg-0.25Sn alloy	148
Figure 8.8. Intergranular failure of an Al-5Cu-0.15Mg-0.25Sn alloy sintered at 590°C for 20 minutes and processed to the T51 condition	148
Figure 8.9. Microstructure of an Al-5Cu-0.15Mg alloy with (a and b) and without (c and d) 0.25%Sn, in the T51 (b and d) and T6 (a and c) condition	149
Figure 8.10. EDS patterns of the boundary phase which forms after solution treating an Al-5Cu-0.15Mg-0.25Sn alloy.....	150
Figure 8.11. Vertical section through the Al-Cu-Sn phase diagram at 4wt%Cu	151
Figure 8.12. The effect of solution treatment time on T51 (a) hardness and (b) tensile strength	151
Figure 8.13. EDS patterns of the intermetallic that forms during sintering at 590°C.....	152
Figure 8.14. Vertical section thorough the Al-Cu-Fe phase diagram at 5wt%Cu.....	153
Figure 8.15. The effect of Sn content on the (a) T51 strength and (b) strain for specimens sintered for 20 minutes at 620°C.....	154
Figure 8.16. Optical micrographs of an Al-5Cu-0.15Mg alloy, in the T51 condition, with (a) 0, (b) 0.05, (c) 0.1 and (d) 0.25%Sn.	155
Figure 8.17. Effect of Mg content on the T6 properties of an Al-4.4Cu-0.8Si-0.1Mg alloy.....	156
Figure 8.18. Sintered density for an Al-4.4Cu-0.8Si-0.5Mg alloy with and without 0.1Sn sintered for 20 minutes at 590 and 620°C.	158
Figure 8.19. Mechanical properties (T51 and T6) for Al-4.4Cu-0.8Si-0.5Mg alloy with and without 0.1%Sn at 590°C and 620°C.....	159
Figure 8.20. Optical micrographs of an Al-4.4Cu-0.8Si-0.5Mg alloy with (b, d, f and h) and without (a, c, e and g) 0.1%Sn.	160
Figure I.1. A schematic view of the interaction of an X-ray photon of energy $h\nu$ with an atomic orbital electron.	185

Figure I.2. Typical ESCA experiment.....	186
Figure I.3. Chemical shift observed for Germanium with a thin oxide layer.....	187
Figure I.4. Schematic of a depth profile for (a) a flat foil and (b) powders	189